

Outdoor Gardening

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, as lockdowns put millions out of work and headlines forecast food shortages, anxious people picked up their rakes and spades.

Many people were cut off from social gatherings. They were worried about bare shelves and contaminated grocery stores. And they needed something to occupy themselves as well as their children.

In response, record numbers of people began cultivating coronavirus victory gardens. In a matter of weeks, seeds, seedlings, and fruit trees sold out online and in gardening centers.

As it turns out, the impulse to garden is actually a great idea — whether or not you're coping with a crisis — because gardening is one of the healthiest hobbies you can develop.

Gardening builds strength, promotes sleep, and helps you maintain a healthy weight

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says gardening is exercise. Activities like raking and cutting grass might fall under the category of light to moderate exercise, while shoveling, digging, and chopping wood might be considered vigorous exercise.

Either way, working in a garden uses every major muscle group in the body. This fact won't surprise anyone who's woken up sore after a day of yard work.

Studies have found that the physical exertion of working in a garden may help offset both age-related weight gain and childhood obesity. And researchers reported that people who garden are more likely to get a solid 7 hours of sleep at night.

Gardening is a mood booster

Studies have found that gardening improves your mood and increases your self-esteem. When people spend time in a garden, their anxiety levels drop and they feel less depressed.

In a multiyear study of people with depression participated in a gardening intervention for 12 weeks. Afterward, researchers measured several aspects of their mental health, including depression symptoms, finding that all of them were significantly improved. And those improvements lasted for months after the intervention ended.

You'll need to take care of yourself while gardening

As is true of almost any activity, gardening poses certain risks to your health and safety. The CDC recommends that you take these precautions while you're in the garden:

- Pay attention to product directions any time you're using chemicals in the garden. Some pesticides, weed killers, and fertilizers can be dangerous if used incorrectly.
- Wear gloves, goggles, long pants, closed-toe shoes, and other safety gear, especially if you're using sharp tools.

- Use bug spray and sunscreen.
- Drink lots of water and take frequent shade breaks to prevent overheating.
- Listen to your body. It's easy to injure yourself when you're toting bags of mulch and hoisting shovels full of dirt.
- Make sure you have a tetanus vaccination once every 10 years, as tetanus lives in the soil.

Key takeaways

Gardening invites you to get outside, interact with other gardeners, and take charge of your own need for exercise, healthy food, and beautiful surroundings. If you're digging, hauling, and harvesting, your physical strength, heart health, weight, sleep, and immune systems all benefit. And those are just the physiological outcomes. Gardening can also cultivate feelings of empowerment, connection, and creative calm. Whether your patch is large or small, a raised bed, community garden, or window box, getting dirty and eating clean are good for you.

The Best Vegetables to Grow in Your Garden



Many gardeners enjoy to grow their own vegetables. There are many advantages to growing your own vegetables. This way, you ensure you'll always have tasty and fully natural vegetables straight in your garden.

Among numerous advantages growing your own veggies bring, saving money is usually not on the list. This is because numerous vegetables are cheaper to buy at the grocery store. This way, it's difficult to save money by growing these vegetables. It's one of the reasons why all gardeners are advised to think carefully and to inform themselves.

Top 6 Vegetables to Grow

Even though many vegetables are very cheap to buy, it's still possible to save some money on certain vegetables, if you know how to choose carefully. Saving money can add another benefit to other advantages of growing your own vegetables.

The trick is to know which vegetables to grow and which ones are better to be bought at a grocery store. Here are the top 6 best vegetables to grow by yourself. These vegetables are chosen because they are relatively easy to grow, and having them in your own garden offer numerous advantages. Plus, it can save you a lot of money.

Top 6 vegetables to grow in your garden are:

1. Lettuce

When planting, make sure to plant only a small amount of seed. In case you plant it all, you might not be able to harvest so much lettuce at the same time, which will make the unharvested plants to bolt quickly. It's therefore better to save the remaining seed for later. Replant the seed every 2-3 weeks throughout the growing seasons. This will give you a steady supply of fresh lettuce.

There are many different lettuce varieties you can try. There are great green leaf varieties, such as Concept, but don't forget about red leaf varieties, such as Magenta. If you choose to grow head-forming lettuce, such as Iceberg, keep in mind that it takes much longer to mature. Also, head-forming lettuce attracts more slugs. This is why leafy varieties are easier to grow and they can be harvested quickly, simply by picking the outer leaves while leaving the rest of the plant so it can continue to grow and produce more leaves.

2. Bell peppers

To have a good supply of peppers, it's enough to plant about ten pepper plants. Each plant will produce at least six peppers.

Depending on your preferences, you can let your pepper crop mature until it turns red, but it's up to you. Keep in mind that red peppers taste sweeter than the green ones.

Peppers are very easy to grow. Keep in mind that they are started in small pots, so you need to transplant them when it's warm enough outside. Also, it's important to pick off any small peppers that may form on transplants or else the growth of the plant will be stunted.

If you want to stimulate the growth of new peppers, pick the green peppers as soon as they reach size. This will sure stimulate the plant to produce more fruit. In case you really want some sweet yellow and red peppers, you can leave some plants unpicked. Keep in mind, however, that these plants will produce less fruit.

3. Garlic

The good news is that garlic is probably one of the easiest crops to grow. One thing you need to keep in mind is that you should never over-water mature plants. When growing your own garlic, keep an eye on weeds. Garlic is very sensitive for any other plant growing in its vicinity. This is why it's important to do some weeding. Another thing to keep in mind is harvesting. Garlic needs to be harvested on time so it can produce bulbs of good keeping quality.

4. Winter Squash

Winter squash is very popular among home gardeners because they are easy to grow and they won't require weeding once they are established. Even more, they can keep through the winter, giving you a great source of vegetable for the cold months.

You should plant them in beds, but the beds don't have to be richly prepared before planting. Keep in mind, however, that the runners need a lot of room to spread. This is why winter squash is ideal for people with lots of garden space.

5. Tomatoes

Tomatoes are grown in plots. A 6' x 12' plot is good for about 8 tomato plants. Cherry varieties give early fruits, while the large varieties are great for summer and fall harvest. The meaty paste tomatoes are great for canning and freezing. These also work great in salsa and sauces. Having your own, fresh tomatoes during winter is a great way to add some vegetables to your meals. Keep in mind that the price of tomatoes goes up in winter, so having your own will sure help you save some money.

6. Broccoli

Keep in mind that broccoli is a cool season crop. It can be grown both as a spring and a fall crop. It requires soil rich with organic matter and lots of food, so it's wise to invest in some soil amenities and organic fertilizer.

Broccoli has a high nutritious value and it's a great source of vitamin A, riboflavin (vitamin B2) and calcium. It's also known as the anti-cancer vegetable.